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Chairman: Mr. Butagira ..... (Uganda)
later: Mr. Anshor (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Indonesia)

Contents

Agenda item 39: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 39: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions (A/60/12 and Add.1, 276, 293, 300 and 440)

1. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)) said that he welcomed the recognition by the international community at the 2005 World Summit of its responsibility to protect civilian populations against genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The decision to create a Peacebuilding Commission was also relevant to the work of UNHCR. As UNHCR was above all a protection agency, protection must inform all its actions.

2. UNHCR was faced with increasing challenges, including confronting rising intolerance, preserving the right of asylum and addressing the clear gap between humanitarian relief and development. Intolerance was perhaps the most difficult challenge to address. The rise of populism had led to a systematic and wilful confusion in public opinion over security problems, terrorism, migrant flows and refugee and asylum issues.

3. The combination of asylum-seekers and migration flows, which was related to the challenge of combating intolerance, was exerting enormous pressure on asylum systems. All States must recognize that guarding borders must not prevent physical access to asylum procedures or fair refugee status determination for those entitled to it under international law. Such access required advocacy and timely protection measures, including the admission of mixed groups of new arrivals and improved screening of individuals. Steps against fraud and abuse were essential for the credibility of the asylum system. His Office stood ready to assist all States in implementing adequate procedures and in capacity-building to ensure that those in need of international protection benefited from it.

4. UNHCR had supported the work of the Global Commission on International Migration and welcomed its October 2005 report. It had been an active member of the Geneva Migration Group and would assist in expanding inter-agency coordination as well as in preparing the 2006 High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development.

5. The third challenge, the lack of an effective link between relief and development, remained a great handicap for UNHCR work, particularly with respect to large-scale repatriation efforts, which required sustained development and stability. As prevention and post-conflict management were crucial to avoiding population displacement, UNHCR planned to play an active role in the work of the Peacebuilding Commission to address not only the relief-to-development gap but also the complex needs of societies emerging from conflict. It would also work to ensure that refugees and displaced persons were automatically incorporated in recovery strategies of all types.

6. UNHCR was fully committed to working with the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank and other partners to help displaced persons to become more productive and self-reliant during their displacement and well after their return. All actors must be mobilized fully to realize the Millennium Development Goals. Whether it was poverty and exclusion, any form of violent conflict, or massive violations of human rights, the international community at large must be willing to address the underlying causes of forced human displacement.

7. The goals of the Peacebuilding Commission meshed with the conceptual framework underpinning the UNHCR Convention Plus unit. Convention Plus would be mainstreamed with efforts by the international community to address refugee problems. While recognizing that voluntary repatriation was still the durable solution of choice for most refugees, UNHCR would actively explore opportunities for expanding resettlement and engage in advocacy for countries which wanted to allow local integration but needed the support of the international community.

8. There was a general consensus, underlined by the Humanitarian Response Review, that the inability to address internal displacement had become the single biggest failure in humanitarian action. In September 2005, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) had supported the clear delineation of responsibilities within the inter-agency collaborative approach to internal displacement. UNHCR had been tasked to lead the sectoral "clusters" of agencies on protection, camp

coordination and management and emergency shelter in a new framework to be applied for future emergencies.

9. The cluster approach had been used to guide the inter-agency response to the devastating earthquake in South Asia in October 2005. UNHCR had deployed large numbers of staff and mounted a massive airlift to transport vast quantities of relief items to Pakistan. The Office had also been asked to support the management of camps for people made homeless by the disaster and its experts were working urgently with a range of partners, particularly the Government of Pakistan, to provide shelter for thousands of families. Although the aid was going to victims of a natural disaster rather than conflict, UNHCR had dug deep into its emergency reserves for several thousand tons of tents, blankets, stoves and other desperately needed supplies. It was the moral responsibility of UNHCR to help, particularly given the generosity which Pakistan had extended to millions of Afghan refugees over the previous two decades.

10. UNHCR had made clear that it would act at the request of the Humanitarian Coordinator with the consent of the country itself if, first, the right of affected populations to seek and enjoy asylum was preserved and, secondly, if funding for those actions was truly additional. While recognizing its role in mobilizing resources for internally displaced persons, UNHCR could not divert funding intended for its work with refugees. The Office looked forward to the efforts of both the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the donor community to meet those supplementary requirements. Addressing the situations of internal displacement placed a premium on partnerships, namely with NGOs.

11. Of particular importance to his Office was work with regional political organizations in the search for durable solutions for refugees and displaced persons, including the European Commission and the African Union. Similar partnership relations must be pursued in Asia and the Americas. UNHCR was cooperating with the Organization of the Islamic Conference to organize a conference on refugees in its member States.

12. In 2004, UNHCR had deployed 184 emergency missions to 24 countries on four continents. Its ability to face emergencies had diminished, however, since the 1990s. Several measures had already been taken to build up capacities so that by 2007 UNHCR would be able to assume a quick and effective response to unexpected refugee crises involving the displacement of up to 500,000 people.

13. The physical security of refugees and returnees remained high on the UNHCR protection agenda. In addition to UNHCR support to national police forces which ensured refugee camp security in countries like the United Republic of Tanzania, Chad, and Kenya, his Office had strengthened its cooperation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in key areas such as rule of law, mine action and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. UNHCR was equally committed to ensuring security for its staff and partners. Minimum operational security standards and training were fundamental. In collaboration with the UNHCR e-Centre in Japan, for example, the Office had introduced risk management tools which assisted colleagues to weigh operational needs against potential security risks.

14. The Office needed a healthy funding base as well as transparency, accountability and structural reform. UNHCR had taken action to strengthen the Office of the Inspector General and had enforced clear rules of non-interference and shared the results of inspections with stakeholders. Members of the Executive Committee would now be able to access inspection findings and put additional questions to the Inspector General.

15. UNCHR had issued its first set of global strategic objectives at the beginning of the planning cycle to instruct and guide the budget and programming process and to establish measurable targets in operations, protection and management. Clear targets meant greater accountability both for UNHCR and the donor community. Every effort had been made to prioritize activities and contain expenditures, particularly administrative costs, always bearing in mind the pressing needs of the people concerned, particularly women and children. UNHCR must not lose its relative financial stability. The key instrument for future changes would be the definition of a workforce management strategy to address simultaneously the efficiency of the Office, the personal fulfilment and welfare of its members and effective gender balance.

16. Owing to large repatriation movements, 2005 had begun with the smallest number of refugees in almost a quarter century. In Afghanistan, for example, nearly half a million Afghans had been assisted by UNHCR to

return home, making it the biggest voluntary repatriation worldwide. Voluntary repatriation remained the Office's main priority. A decade had passed since the Dayton Peace Agreement, which had reaffirmed UNHCR as the lead humanitarian agency for the return and reintegration of refugees and displaced persons in the former Yugoslavia. In Africa, more than a half a million refugees had returned home in 2005. UNHCR had facilitated the repatriation of more than 38,000 Liberian refugees and provided material assistance and transportation for the return of 200,000 internally displaced persons. Angolans were also coming home in relevant numbers, concluding the final chapter of their exile.

17. UNHCR was gearing up for three large returns in Africa. There was increasing optimism among Burundi refugees following the recent elections with the rate of returns from the United Republic of Tanzania doubling in comparison to the previous months. To date, more than 60,000 refugees had returned in 2005. Paradoxically, one of the agency's largest repatriations was also among its least well funded. In the Sudan, the hope engendered by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement for the South must be fulfilled. To renew optimism among the exiles and displaced in the south, the international community must mobilize support for both the institutional build-up and the economic development of the area to create the conditions for sustainable returns. The international community must also throw its full weight behind the peace processes for Darfur, where a peace agreement was a basic precondition for security and reconciliation. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, hope was reborn. It must be actively sustained by all.

18. In Colombia, internal displacement affected more than 2 million people. UNHCR had a leading role in protecting them as well as refugees in Ecuador, Costa Rica, Panama and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Only small numbers had been recognized as such by national bodies, but UNHCR was working on the strengthening of asylum systems and supporting host communities in the region.

19. In other areas, problems had been resolved or addressed. For example, 12,000 Tajik refugees had been granted citizenship in Turkmenistan, and progress had been made on the protection of Vietnamese Montagnards and persons from Myanmar in Thailand. Other problems persisted such as Western Saharan refugees in Tindouf, the Bhutanese in Nepal, or the Rohingyas in Bangladesh.

20. The humanitarian transfer from Kyrgyzstan was an example of UNHCR operations. After the violent events in Andijan in May 2005, UNHCR had moved most of the 450 Uzbek asylum seekers from Kyrgyzstan to Romania to ensure their protection and for future resettlement. Tragic events in 2005 proved the need to reinforce international cooperation on rescues at sea. His Office had been working with the International Maritime Organization and was doing everything in its power to ensure that the global search and rescue regime was respected. UNHCR would also continue to be attentive to situations of direct or indirect refoulement governed by bilateral agreements which disregarded international law or by the treatment of bona fide asylum-seekers as illegal migrants.

21. Lastly, the fight against intolerance involved the entire international community, which must stand against irrationality and exclusion and reaffirm its accountability to refugees. The institution of asylum must be defended and cherished at all costs.

22. **Mr. Saeed** (Sudan), noting that the Sudan had both received many refugees and faced refugee problems of its own, said that his Government would continue to cooperate closely with UNHCR. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government of the Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement had brought many changes which required the attention of UNHCR. The spontaneous and disorganized return of refugees posed a potential threat to the success of the Agreement. Further information was needed on the measures which might by taken by UNHCR and the international community to ensure the orderly, voluntary return of refugees to the Sudan. Clarification was also needed on the reference in the report to the ongoing programmes of repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction in Africa, particularly in southern Sudan (A/60/12, para. 22).

23. With respect to Darfur, his Government had signed a document with the United Nations which facilitated the provision of humanitarian assistance, especially by the International Organization for Migration. His delegation would like further details on the measures which UNHCR was taking in that regard. The forthcoming negotiations sponsored by the African

Union should bring about a definitive agreement which would resolve the problems surrounding Darfur.

24. Regarding under-age refugees, UNICEF had been making efforts in southern Sudan to reintegrate young persons into communities through education, training and employment programmes. He would like to know about the steps which UNHCR planned to take to address the problem. Lastly, he called upon the international community to provide the necessary financial resources for the Office to pursue such activities and encouraged UNHCR to work with other relevant agencies to deal with refugee problems.

25. **Mr. Tarar** (Pakistan) said that his Government appreciated the alacrity with which UNHCR had responded to the earthquake in Pakistan. Although the report of the High Commissioner (A/60/12) provided a detailed account of the activities of the Office, explicit mention should have been made of the efforts of his Government since 1979 to host the largest refugee population in the world, at great expense. In addition, humanitarian agencies had been contributing what amounted to be some 25 cents per refugee per day in Pakistan, which did not cover the cost of even a half litre of milk. The contribution of his Government to meeting most of the humanitarian needs of the victims of the earthquake should therefore be given greater attention.

26. **Mr. Lake** (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf on the European Union, asked what mechanisms were in place to facilitate interaction between UNHCR, UNDG, UNDP and the World Bank, and to what extent those mechanisms had helped displaced persons to become more productive and self-reliant. He also inquired what lessons UNHCR had learned from its adoption of a cluster approach and whether it had the capacity to carry out such activities for a range of emergencies on a sustainable basis.

27. **Ms. Tchitanava** (Georgia) said that only intensive cooperation among Governments, relevant United Nations agencies and NGOs would help to ease the suffering caused by displacement and ultimately facilitate the return of refugees to their homes. The High Commissioner should therefore continue his dialogue with IASC with a view to achieving lasting solutions that addressed the root causes of the problems.

28. While the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia (S/2005/657) indicated a decrease in the number of internally displaced persons in that region, the main reason for that decrease had been the deaths of those people. The crucial questions to ask were when the remaining refugees would be allowed to return, what sort of peacekeeping the United Nations was going to promote and whose rights it would protect. She regretted that the authorities in Abkhazia were still opposing all efforts aimed at conflict resolution and refusing to allow the refugees to return to their homes. It was also unfortunate that negotiations to secure the prompt and safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons to South Ossetia had stalled. Nevertheless, there was an urgent need for UNHCR to monitor the conditions of the Georgian internally displaced persons who were returning to the Gali district spontaneously and without guarantees. The ban placed on the teaching of the Georgian language in schools in Gali, which was tantamount to cultural genocide, also remained unresolved.

29. She invited the High Commissioner to visit Georgia to examine the situation with regard to refugees and internally displaced persons with a view to ensuring that the people who had been forced to flee their homes would neither lose their right to return nor their property.

30. **Ms. Korneliouk** (Belarus) affirmed her support for the work of UNHCR.

31. **Mr. Anshor** (Indonesia) sought clarification regarding the rights of internally displaced persons to seek asylum when they were the victims of natural disasters rather than conflict.

32. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that UNHCR was also concerned about the orderly return of refugees to southern Sudan. A first group of about 5,000 refugees would soon be able to fly to southern Sudan from the Central African Republic and a second group would return from there by road once demining work had been completed. While the orderly and safe return of refugees to the Democratic Republic of Congo had been delayed by the actions of the Lord's Resistance Army in southern Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo itself, UNHCR would be in a position to begin the repatriation of volunteer refugees from Kenya by the end of the year. In all circumstances, it was very important for a memorandum of understanding to be signed by the Government of the

country of origin and the Government of the country of repatriation. In the case of the Sudan, however, it would be necessary to clarify the identity of the signatory to such an understanding. His Office had agreed to play an enhanced role in supporting the orderly return of internally displaced persons to southern Sudan, and he hoped that all the relevant actors would participate in that process.

33. The lack of a basic infrastructure in southern Sudan was a major factor preventing refugees from returning home, and it was unfortunate that UNHCR did not have the capacity to provide the conditions needed for their sustainable return. Consequently, all the development actors should be brought into the repatriation process at an early stage in order to bridge the gap between relief assistance and development assistance. He hoped that the Peacebuilding Commission would play an important role in that respect, and he was also actively engaged in a dialogue with UNDG and UNDP to ensure the early involvement of Governments in their joint efforts.

34. UNHCR had been assisting those willing to return to western Darfur when permitted by the security circumstance. However, a peace agreement would have to be signed and implemented, and a great deal of support and investment would be needed from the international community before the refugees could return on a large scale. To that end, UNHCR would cooperate actively with all the relevant United Nations agencies and the other actors involved.

35. He recognized the extreme generosity of Pakistan as well as the significant contribution of the Islamic Republic of Iran in their efforts to receive and protect refugees from Afghanistan. In that connection, UNHCR was cooperating with the Government of Pakistan on the preparation of a conference, to be held in 2006, to draw attention to the need for international economic and environmental assistance to the areas impacted by refugees. He also acknowledged that the main protection given to the refugees in Pakistan was provided by the authorities of that country and not by UNHCR.

36. To be effective, the cluster approach needed to be very flexible and to benefit as much as possible from the capacities of other agencies. For example, UNHCR did not have lead responsibility for the shelter cluster in Pakistan. However, it had placed its shelter capacity at the disposal of the Government of Pakistan since it had been able to do so immediately.

37. He accepted the invitation to visit Georgia and said that the comments of that country's representative demonstrated the need for political problems to be solved by the main actors, with the support of the international community, before a real humanitarian solution could be achieved. The key problem in the modern world was rising intolerance between different peoples, and in order for them to live together in harmony it was essential to combat populism, all forms of racism, xenophobia, nationalism and religious fundamentalism.

38. He welcomed the words of support from Belarus and said that UNHCR had been working successfully with the Commonwealth of Independent States in building capacity for asylum systems.

39. His earlier comments on the conditions under which UNHCR would provide assistance to internally displaced persons pertained mostly to situations of conflict and not to natural disasters. However, UNHCR was available to provide such assistance where its expertise was useful, and it had been cooperating with the Government of Indonesia in the tsunami-affected areas. He also stressed that any assistance provided to internally displaced persons by UNHCR should not be used as an excuse to prevent them from seeking asylum. Moreover, the mandate of UNHCR was clear and must never be undermined by organizational decisions taken within the United Nations system or the humanitarian community.

40. **Mr. Thomson** (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Union; the acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania; the candidate countries Croatia and Turkey; the stabilization and association process countries Albania, Serbia and Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; and, in addition, Norway, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that the recent attack on Aro Sharrow camp in western Darfur was a matter of grave concern. All parties to the conflict should stop all violence immediately and reach a lasting peace agreement without delay. The European Union welcomed the peace accord for southern Sudan and supported the work of UNHCR to improve the conditions for the people returning spontaneously to that region as a result. It also welcomed the role played by UNHCR and the Governments of Kyrgyzstan and Romania in

satisfactorily resolving the threatened return of Uzbek refugees.

41. The European Union acknowledged the burden borne by other regions in protecting refugees and had therefore endorsed conclusions on pilot regional protection programmes which, in cooperation with UNHCR, were aimed at improving the protection of refugees and finding sustainable solutions to their plight. The programmes were complementary to the European Union's efforts towards the establishment of a common European asylum system by 2010.

42. The European Union was fully engaged in the process of identifying those individuals entitled to asylum or receiving different forms of international protection. However, there was still room for all relevant stakeholders to address the misuse of the asylum system and thereby preserve the high importance and value of the system itself.

43. Many important decisions and conclusions adopted during the last session of the Executive Committee of the Programme of UNHCR would contribute towards strengthening global cooperation on protection and assistance. However, there remained a shortage of protection staff on the ground and UNHCR management must prioritize protection in its allocation of staff posts. Effective protection was also dependent on productive relations between UNHCR and its partners, including NGOs and other United Nations agencies. In that respect, when working in countries where refugees were returning home, UNHCR must ensure that exit and hand-over strategies had been defined from the outset so that it did not invest resources in development activities where other agencies might have a comparative advantage.

44. Welcoming the undertaking of UNHCR to assume lead responsibility for protection, camp management and shelter during crises involving internally displaced persons, he agreed that the mandate of UNHCR remained its first priority and that refugee protection should not be negatively affected by the involvement of UNHCR with internally displaced persons.

45. The European Union supported the move of UNHCR towards a needs-based planning and budgeting approach and encouraged management to ensure that incentives were put in place to that end.

46. **Mr. Martins** (Angola), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said that while efforts had been made to tackle the root causes of the problem of refugees and displaced persons in Africa, the region still accounted for about a third of the global refugee population. He was encouraged, however, by positive developments which would enable millions of such persons to return to their countries in safety and dignity as durable solutions were found to various protracted refugee situations in Africa.

47. The SADC Council of Ministers had recognized that preventive measures were not a substitute for protective measures but complemented them; it had stressed that the most vulnerable groups needed to be supported through regional integration based on the promotion of democracy, good governance and respect for human rights. SADC remained committed to strengthening national and regional mechanisms to create sustainable local capacity for protecting and assisting refugees and give effect to the concept of burden sharing. It supported a holistic approach to the refugee problem.

48. Voluntary repatriation was the preferred solution and should be promoted within the context of the "4Rs" approach (Return, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction), while a key priority was to ensure a smooth transition from emergency relief to longer-term development, particularly in post-conflict situations. To those ends, it was important to strengthen cooperation between UNHCR and the African Union.

49. One of the most pressing issues arising from forced displacements in Africa was the need to protect refugee women and children. The emphasis should therefore shift from standard-setting to implementation of all the relevant international legal instruments and Security Council resolutions. Looking ahead to the challenges facing the southern African region, he urged the international community to continue to support SADC by providing increased assistance to countries of origin and shelter for their repatriation, resettlement and rehabilitation programmes.

50. *Mr. Anshor (Indonesia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

51. **Mr. Shimamori** (Japan) said that the legal framework for protecting refugees had been established by the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol. Since, however, it was difficult to determine whether a specific applicant was entitled to refugee status, he

welcomed the recent affirmation by the international community, through the Executive Committee of the Programme of UNHCR, of its commitment to safeguarding the principle of refugee protection. In that regard, he endorsed the principles of international solidarity and burden-sharing, in view of the economic and social strains that large flows of refugees caused to host communities.

52. Japan, for its part, had adopted an amended Immigration Control Act and established a new system whereby applicants for refugee status could stay in the country under specific conditions. It recognized the increased importance of durable solutions and accordingly advocated the concept of human security with the aim of enabling refugees and returnees to be self-reliant and make an essential contribution to development. That approach called for a concerted effort within the United Nations to bridge the gap between emergency relief and development, as exemplified by the Human Security Trust Fund.

53. Internationally displaced persons were the primary responsibility of States, as clearly indicated in the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement issued by UNHCR. In some cases, however, the assistance of the international community was necessary. Japan was following with interest the discussion of cluster leads recommended by the humanitarian response review and welcomed the willingness of UNHCR to consider assuming the role of cluster lead in the protection and camp-management of persons internally displaced by conflict.

54. **Ms. Che** Ying (China) noted that, while the number of refugees worldwide had fallen in 2004, the number of people of concern to UNHCR had risen. She expressed the hope that the commitment made by States at the 2005 World Summit to seek durable solutions to the problem of refugees in a spirit of international solidarity and burden-sharing would give fresh impetus to the international protection of refugees. Just as there could be no lasting peace without development, so there could be no durable solution to the problem of refugees without peace.

55. UNHCR should continue to play its catalytic role in encouraging the international community to increase its assistance to developing countries receiving large inflows of refugees. A further important role of UNHCR was to help countries to find durable solutions; it should discharge its international protection mandate on the basis of full cooperation with Member States.

56. She encouraged UNHCR to take the opportunity of the ongoing reform of the United Nations system to enhance its internal management and improve efficiency in its use of funds. Her country supported the measures it had taken to ensure the safety of its relief workers but warned it against attempts by wrongdoers to use asylum to escape from justice. She called for strict compliance with the refugee Convention so as to guard against the politicization of the international protection regime for refugees.

57. China, for its part, had been actively promoting Asia-Pacific mechanisms in support of refugees, displaced persons and migrants and stood ready to engage in further exchanges with other Asia and Pacific countries and UNHCR in the same spirit.

58. **Mr. Perez** (Switzerland) noted that Jordan was preparing for its election to the Executive Committee of the UNHCR Programme. His country supported that election and hoped that Jordan would take the opportunity to become a party to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol.

59. Switzerland supported any initiative to strengthen the agency's capacity for protection, which was central to its mandate. The agency's involvement in action on behalf of displaced persons should not be to the detriment of its main task of coordinating international action to protect refugees and find durable solutions to their problems. Moreover, the ongoing reform of the United Nations system should bolster collaborative efforts by the relevant bodies to respond to the needs of displaced persons. Consultations on protection should be held within the framework of the IASC, in particular with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), to avoid duplication between the two bodies.

60. Switzerland encouraged UNHCR and other members of IASC to associate concerned Governments more closely with the ongoing reform process and called on the High Commissioner to ensure maximum transparency in resource allocation for displaced persons. While noting that UNHCR did not intend to assume a similar responsibility for persons displaced by natural disasters, he urged it to make its expertise available for needs assessments. Lastly, on the Convention Plus initiative, he expressed his country's support for the High Commissioner's proposal to

pursue specific approaches to the problem of long-term refugees.

61. **Mr. Laurin** (Canada) said that it was critically important for all States to demonstrate through concrete action their commitment to refugee protection, particularly to the principle of non-refoulement. He noted that while the number of refugees worldwide had decreased, the number of internally displaced persons continued to rise. Initiatives to tackle the causes of forced displacement and promote reconciliation were therefore to be supported.

62. He welcomed the adoption by the Executive Committee of conclusions on complementary forms of protection and on local integration. As for the decision to establish cluster coordination, that would offer a means of fostering greater collaboration, predictability and accountability in multilateral responses to crisis-affected populations. UNHCR must be careful that action in support of internally displaced persons was not at the expense of refugee protection. On humanitarian action, a concerted United Nations-wide approach was of the highest importance; on the issue of asylum, it was essential to preserve its civilian and humanitarian character. Canada welcomed the High Commissioner's emphasis on strengthening the agency's refugee protection capacity and the commitment to results-based budgeting, but remained concerned about the projected deficit. Noting the positive response to the enlargement of the Executive Committee, he said that new members who were not signatories to the 1951 Convention or its 1967 Protocol should publicly express their commitment to the principle of non-refoulement, their interest in finding solutions to refugee problems and their intention to become States parties.

63. **Mr. Benmehidi** (Algeria) said that the reduction in the number of refugees was noteworthy as it was the result of large-scale voluntary repatriations following the settlement of conflicts, particularly in Africa. Nevertheless, tensions still existing in some parts of the continent continued to trigger flows of refugees and displaced persons. Of the total number of refugees in the world, one third were in Africa, creating a heavy burden for host countries.

64. The positive results of repatriation operations in the previous year could only encourage UNHCR to continue its efforts to achieve durable solutions, ensure equitable sharing of burdens and responsibilities and strengthen refugee protection and reception capacities, particularly for women and children. Algeria welcomed the establishment of partnership arrangements between UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies and NGOs and the strengthening of its partnerships with traditional donors and complementary sources of financing. Further efforts needed to be made, however, in order to meet the outstanding deficit.

65. Algeria had always offered its hospitality to refugees, and in particular to Saharawi refugees. The resulting burden was shared with UNHCR, which had however recently, on the basis of a disputable reassessment of refugee numbers, reduced the amount of refugee assistance that it provided in conjunction with the World Food Programme (WFP). He expressed the hope that the joint UNHCR-WFP delegation that would shortly be visiting Algeria would correct the figures so as not to put the lives of the refugees in danger. The fate of the Saharawi refugees depended on the implementation of Security Council resolutions calling for a referendum on self-determination in the Western Sahara. As an essential political part of that process, it was necessary to register its population, including those who had become refugees in Algeria.

66. **Ms. Mtawali** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that her Government continued to host the largest protracted refugee caseload in Africa and that it needed more international assistance to provide essential facilities and services. It was currently involved in two major voluntary repatriation operations involving Burundian and Congolese refugees but was concerned that the Burundian repatriation might be reduced or suspended altogether if funds were not provided. It called upon the international donor community to come forward in support of such voluntary repatriation programmes.

67. There was deep concern in her country about the protection and security of refugees. Although sexual violence and banditry posed problems in the camps, the security package funded by UNHCR enabled the Government to exercise a reasonable degree of safety and security.

68. Her Government fully supported the UNHCR initiative aimed at addressing the plight of internally displaced persons (IDPs). It was pleased at the turn of events in the Great Lakes region and in Africa as a

whole and hoped that repatriation operations would continue to take place.

69. **Mr. Chernenko** (Russian Federation) said that globalization had affected migration flows and that there were many economic migrants who did not require international protection. Abuse of the institution of asylum diverted significant resources from efforts to provide international protection for refugees and undermined the authority of UNHCR. The proposal to establish migrant processing centres at points on the periphery of the countries of destination was not feasible and would be degrading to the countries where such camps would be located. It would discredit all asylum-seekers because it would imply that their objective was not to escape persecution but to migrate to a prosperous country.

70. His delegation called for active measures to combat international criminal groups specializing in illegal migration. The existence of bogus asylum-seekers, however, had been the result of strict visa regimes for migrant workers in the majority of developed countries. Security was a priority for his Government. Strict control over violations of migration regulations, however, should be complemented by reasonable and legitimate policies to engage migrants.

71. He recalled the 1996 regional conference on refugee and migrant issues in countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The States parties to the conference had moved from emergency response to massive movements of persons to targeted regulation of migration flows, and his delegation trusted that cooperation would continue following the completion of the conference process at the bilateral and subregional levels, with the assistance of UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other international organizations.

72. The Russian Federation noted with satisfaction the decline in the number of persons requiring international protection, including internally displaced persons. Governments bore the main responsibility for the care of internally displaced persons, and international humanitarian assistance should be provided only with the consent of the national authorities concerned.

73. His delegation was grateful for the assistance provided by UNHCR in resolving the problem of internally displaced persons in the northern Caucasus region of the Russian Federation. Currently, given the normalization of the situation in the Chechen Republic, the Office had taken the right decision by making the transition starting in 2006 from emergency response to development assistance mechanisms.

74. His Government supported UNHCR initiatives to enhance the effectiveness of the Office as well as the principles of voluntary funding of UNHCR programmes, to which the Russian Federation would continue to contribute.

75. **Ms. Attard-Montalto** (Malta) said that Malta recognized its international and moral responsibility to provide asylum to those who genuinely needed it, in accordance with international conventions. In the past few years, Malta had granted refugee status or protected humanitarian status to approximately 53 per cent of asylum-seekers, which was the highest acceptance rate in Europe. Malta had improved its capacity-building in an effort to expedite the process of granting refugee status and had increased the number of centres to accommodate third country nationals.

76. The dramatic rise in the number of irregular immigrants over the past few years had had a severe impact on the country. Illegal immigration due to human trafficking in the Mediterranean posed a serious challenge to the Government and seriously undermined the cause of genuine refugees and persons deserving humanitarian status. The current strains on Malta's health, employment and social services as well as internal security and public order were aggravated by a lack of human and financial resources. The situation was accentuated by Malta's geographical situation and the fact that it was the smallest and most densely populated country in the European Union.

77. Malta agreed with UNHCR that refugee protection and migration required a separate but interlinked approach. While awaiting the high-level dialogue on international migration and development, which was due to take place in 2006, Malta would continue working with UNHCR, IOM and other such organizations to find a solution to the acute problem of illegal immigration.

78. **Mr. Aksen** (Turkey) said that the Turkish Government attached great importance to the successful return of displaced persons on a voluntary basis and had been implementing a relevant programme since 1994. A dialogue had been initiated with the United Nations, the World Bank and the representatives of the European Commission of Human

Rights in Turkey, with a view to defining possible areas of cooperation and methods. A national integrated strategy for IDPs had also been developed, in line with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. Finally, Turkey was cooperating closely with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on a project to support the development of a programme for IDPs in Turkey.

79. **Mr. Kapoma** (Zambia) said that new large-scale emergencies continued to occur in spite of marked progress in the world's refugee situation. Zambia itself currently hosted some 200,000 refugees and was actively involved in the voluntary repatriation of refugees from Angola and Rwanda. Although considerable progress had been made with respect to the Angolan refugees, the Rwandans had shown a distinct reluctance to return to their country. With respect to the Congo, Zambia urged UNHCR to work closely with the Government of that country to create conditions that were more conducive to the return of refugees.

80. Bearing in mind that voluntary repatriation was the preferred solution to the refugee problem, he appealed to the international community to support the efforts of UNHCR and IOM. Zambia was cooperating with UNHCR on the development of an initiative to alleviate the effects of the food deficit, poor infrastructure and limited access to public services. The purpose of the initiative was to enable refugees to acquire a measure of self-reliance pending the achievement of an appropriate durable solution. Lastly, his delegation urged the international community to address the political unrest and social tensions that continued to produce movements of refugees and internally displaced persons in most parts of the world.

81. **Ms. Plaisted** (United States of America) said that her delegation was pleased that large numbers of refugees would be returning to southern Sudan, the Congo, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the coming year. Resettlement was another important solution for refugees, particularly for the many who lived in limbo in protracted situations. The United States had resettled over 2.6 million refugees since 1975 and was relying on UNHCR to help it continue its resettlement programme. It welcomed the initiative to strengthen the agency's partnerships with other international and non-governmental organizations and was pleased that closer collaboration with WFP on life-saving refugee-feeding issues was beginning to pay dividends. However, because refugee-feeding programmes remained seriously underfunded, donors must commit to doing more.

82. With respect to the proposed "cluster" approach, Governments and UNHCR must not allow attention to the needs of the internally displaced to dilute or detract from the commitment to refugees. Donor contributions and UNHCR expenditures in support of the IDP response must not reduce contributions or expenditures towards refugee protection and assistance. In its response to emergencies, UNHCR must be able to quickly deploy a well-trained core staff and the international community must help create a safe environment for refugees and humanitarian workers.

83. The United States was pleased that UNHCR was serious about enhancing oversight, transparency and accountability, and pointed out that progress also meant filling the "implementation gap". The United States firmly supported the work of UNHCR and called upon all countries and humanitarian partners to work closely together to ensure fair asylum policies.

84. **Mr. Schulz** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)) said that the priority of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies was to protect and assist vulnerable people, including refugees, IDPs, undocumented migrants and victims of smuggling and trafficking, regardless of their legal status and without discrimination of any kind. One of their main concerns was "people living in the shadows", namely those marginalized by the fact that many Governments still had not adopted migration policies or legislation to facilitate orderly migration.

85. IFRC was increasingly concerned about the propensity of Governments to see the establishment of camps as the standard solution to an influx of asylum-seekers. Although UNHCR had succeeded in limiting the effects of camp life on people, there were continued reports of protection risks, violence, mental health problems, dependency on external assistance and the loss of human dignity for the persons themselves. IFRC urged all Governments to view camps as a last resort and to cooperate more closely with UNHCR and relevant regional organizations to address the needs of the people.

86. It was disquieting that victims of trafficking continued to be criminalized in some countries. Both smuggling and trafficking had increased in recent years, owing to poverty and the absence of coherent

migration legislation. IFRC was in favour of handling such population movement issues at the regional level and had cooperated successfully with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in the Asia-Pacific and European regions.

87. The majority of the world's displaced persons were refugees who had fled from natural disasters rather than conflicts. IFRC was an organization built to meet human needs in the most critical emergency situations and as such would continue to cooperate closely with UNHCR.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.